

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER NEWSLETTER

Meet the LHA Housing Team



Big news! We're so excited to announce that we've added three new members to our team! They are all extremely efficient in their respective fields, and we are so excited to have them on board. Take a few moments to browse below and read the new Housing function assignments.



Susana Valencia

Senior Housing Caseworker
svalencia@longviewtexas.gov

Housing Functions:

Annual Recertifications (A-M)
Interims: Income & Household Changes (A-M)
Rental Increases (A-M)
Portability
Continuum of Care



Maria Underwood

Housing Caseworker
munderwood@longviewtexas.gov

Housing Functions:

Annual Recertifications (N-Z)
Interims: Income & Household Changes (N-Z)
Rental Increases (N-Z)
Assistance Check Inquires & Trainings



Adrienne Arthur

Housing Services Specialist
aarthur@longviewtexas.gov

Housing Functions:

Moves and Unit Transfers
Family Self-Sufficiency
Home Ownership
Portability

Customer Service Hours:



LHA Business Hours:

Monday—Friday, 8am –5pm

Lunch Hour:

12:30pm—1:30pm, daily

Weekly Staff

Meeting/Training:

Caseworkers are unavailable every Wednesday from 8:30am—9:30am.

Walk-Ins are allowed on Tuesday's, only. Participating families and landlords **MUST** schedule an appointment to be seen any other day.

Office Closings:

December 24—25
January 1
January 25

LHA Jurisdiction:

LHA now services the following areas:

- Kilgore
- Henderson
- Carthage
- Beckville
- Longview

****Service areas must be within a two (2) mile radius of the city limits.**



Tommy Thomas

Housing Inspector
tthomas@longviewtexas.gov

Housing Functions:

Housing Inspections



Kelli Dearion

Housing Office Assistant
kdearion@longviewtexas.gov

Housing Functions:

Changes in Landlord Accounts
Direct Deposit Inquiries
Waitlist Inquiries



Cheteva Marshall

Housing Executive Director (Interim)
cmarshall@longviewtexas.gov

Tenant/Landlord Complaints

Complaints against a tenant or a landlord, for any reason, must be submitted in writing to LHA. LHA staff are unable to process complaints unless you have first expressed your concern verbally with the tenant or landlord, then secondly submitted the complaint in writing to them. Please allow the landlord three (3) business days to respond before the written complaint is submitted to LHA, unless the issue is life threatening or the unit is not habitable. Landlords and tenants are responsible to immediately notify LHA in the following instances: fire in the unit, severe water leakage in the unit, faulty electrical circuits in the unit, septic or sewer backup, non-operational HVAC units, acts of nature which cause the unit to no longer be habitable, gas leak. Written complaints should be submitted by email cmarshall@longviewtexas.gov.

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Things to Remember:



-All income and household changes must be reported within **10** business days of the change effective date

-All transactions will be processed within **10** business days

-Landlords have **10** business days to revise/correct a RFTA

-Inspections are scheduled within **10** business days of qualification

LHA Customer Service Enhancements

LHA has launched several new enhancements as part of an effort to improve response times, program transparency, and overall to further your experience as our customer. The following enhancements have been implemented with you in mind:

- **Housing Webpage:** *Along with the City of Longview's website upgrade, we have also upgraded our webpage. Aside from an updated look, the new webpage features a powerful new way to sift through our program, making it easier for you to better understand our wide range of services and capabilities. In addition, we've added FAQs and Housing documents.*
- **Phone Call Quality Assurance:** *All phone calls to LHA are now being recorded for supervisory monitoring and quality assurance.*
- **Phone Menu:** *We've made a few changes in Housing concerning our phone system. It is imperative that callers listen to all menu options, as the options have changed. The main menu now details the routine dates and times that caseworkers are unavailable and callers are encouraged to email and/or send their request to Assistance Check for more expedient service. As per City policy, phone calls will be returned within the allotted 24 business hour period. The new menu options are as follows:*
 - ◇ *Office location and hours of operation, press 1*
 - ◇ *FSS, Homeownership, Zero-Income or inquiries concerning all Moves, press 2*
 - ◇ *Annual Re-exams and changes for last names beginning with A-M, Portability, VASH, or Continuum of Care, press 3*
 - ◇ *Annual Re-exams and other changes for last names beginning with N-Z, press 4.*
 - ◇ *Waitlist Inquires, press 5*
 - ◇ *Assistance Check Inquiries or Direct Deposit Confirmations, press 6*
 - ◇ *1099s, press 7*
 - ◇ *Inspections, press 8.*
 - ◇ *If your caseworker's voicemail box is full, press 9*
- **Assistance Check Online Portal:** *Beginning March 1, 2014, we began to offer a new secure, online service called AssistanceCheck. This convenient service allows you to contact us and make requests online rather than in person or by mail. Some of the services offered include: update your contact information; view, print, and submit required documents; link to our online statement system, HAPCheck; advertise vacate units; search for vacate units.*

In order to use AssistanceCheck, you must first create an account online at www.assistancecheck.com. LHA no longer provides payment details to landlords or tenants.
- **Email:** *All are welcome to visit LHA's webpage (www.longviewtexas.gov/Housing) to access important information such as program rules, FAQs, forms, etc. Visiting the webpage should address most questions and/or concerns. If there are additional questions or concerns, families and landlords are encouraged to communicate them in writing through email to LHA.*

- **Service Surveys:** After services have been rendered by LHA, you may be randomly selected to participate in a customer service survey. Surveys are conducted by phone and mail. Surveys are also located in the lobby of the Housing Office.
- **Various Workshops and Trainings:** Training schedule is included in this issue.
- **Streamlined Recertification Process:** The recertification process is a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requirement that allows LHA to review participant income and household composition and to adjust the household's level of assistance accordingly. Regular re-examinations must be performed at least annually. Prior to the effective date, recertification packets are mailed. Generally, packets are mailed at least 60 days prior to the effective date. Five (5) options are provided to return and complete the recertification process: (1) Upload all documents through Assistance Check ;(2) Email documents to lha@longviewtexas.gov; (3) Mail your documents to: Longview Housing Authority, P.O. Box 1952, Longview, TX 75606 (to guarantee receipt we suggest you send the documents certified mail); (4) Fax to (903) 237-1254. Please fax all documents at one time to ensure that your documents are received; (5) Bring documents to the Housing office.



Program Integrity

LHA continues to actively pursue the recovery of HAP payments released to landlords whose HAP contracts have been terminated due to the tenant moving without notice or due to unreported eviction. According to the HAP contract, Section 7, HAP payments to owners are due only when the tenant resides in the unit and shall not be paid for any month after the tenant moves out. The problem we face is that BOTH parties (tenant and landlord) often fail to promptly notify LHA when an eviction occurs, the tenant vacates the unit, and/or a lease is terminated early. As a result of this frequent issue, effective January 1, 2016, any HAP payment released to ineligible landlords and not reimbursed to LHA within 30 days of receipt will be subject to a court filed judgment for the HAP amount and fees as well as possible garnishment of funds through the U.S. Office of Inspector General. Preventing debt to LHA can be avoided if these actions are taken:

1. Understand that the landlord is not entitled to any portion of the HAP payment when the tenant is not physically residing in the unit.
2. Submit a written statement to LHA when the tenant has moved out of the unit; the lease is being terminated early; when the lease is not being renewed; and/or if an eviction has occurred.
3. If a HAP payment is released in error, promptly return the full HAP payment to LHA (Attn: Cheteva Marshall at P.O. Box 1952, Longview, Texas 75606) within 30 days of receipt.

Be advised that if a judgment has been granted due to debt owed to LHA, the landlord will be officially banned from participation in the HCV program, and the judgement will not be removed until the debt is paid in full.

Landlord Information Changes

If your email address or other personal information changes, remember to notify LHA of those changes in writing or through Assistance Check. Should your banking information change, you must submit a new "Direct Deposit Form" with voided check or official bank documentation containing your name, address, routing and bank account numbers. This information can be emailed to kdearion@longviewtexas.gov or lha@longviewtexas.gov. If your EIN or tax ID number changes, you will also need to complete a new W-9. All required forms can be retrieved on Assistance Check or the [Housing webpage](#).

Lease Non-Renewals & Tenant Moves

Upon the submission of a notice of lease non-renewal or the tenant submits a notice to vacate the unit, LHA will stop HAP payments effective the date specified or implied in the correspondence. Should the family remain in the unit after the lease end date or after the date specified to vacate, it is the landlord's responsibility to regain possession of the unit. LHA is not authorized to become involved in the process and cannot make HAP payments once we have received notification that the family must vacate the property. However, if the family and landlord mutually agree to rescind the previously submitted lease termination or vacate notice before the HAP termination date, LHA must receive written notice from both the family and landlord stating their agreement for the family to remain in the unit for the upcoming HAP contract term. If the notice is not received by LHA prior to the HAP contract end date, the family must submit a new move packet for the unit and the unit must pass inspection so a new HAP contract can be executed. Otherwise, the landlord must pursue the family in court for possession of the unit. Be advised that the family is solely responsible for the rent owed to the landlord during this time.

HAP Abatements & HAP Contract Terminations

Housing Assistance Payments will be held 30 days after a unit has failed inspection if the required repairs have not been corrected. Payments will be abated 60 days following a failed inspection if the required repairs have not been corrected. At the end of the 60 day period, LHA will terminate the HAP contract. Units will only be inspected twice. If the unit fails to meet the HQS requirements at the second inspection, the HAP contract will be terminated and the family will be required to move in order to continue to receive their housing assistance. If the family opts to remain in the unit after the HAP contract has been terminated, the family will be solely responsible for the full rent payment to the owner. RHA will make no additional payments.

RFTA Errors and How They Affect You



1. LHA is unable to process a Request for Tenancy Approval (RFTA) or provide a rent estimate without the following information:

- a. Box #2 (Address of unit including street address, apartment number, city, state, and zip code)
- b. Box #6 (Proposed rent)
- c. Signatures by you and the tenant

2. Other missing information can be completed/revised via email, but will delay the processing of your RFTA.

3. Be sure to properly complete Section #11, Utilities and Appliances. The accuracy of your rent estimate is impacted by utility responsibilities.

4. The owner/agent/tenant will be given a total of 10 business days to complete the missing or incomplete information on the RFTA before it is cancelled and the family will be required to locate another unit.



Calendar Events

***Inspection Housing Quality Standards Trainings :**

March 14, 2016

June, 13, 2016

September 12, 2016

***Homeownership Trainings :**

January 28, 2016

May 26, 2016

October 27, 2016

* The above training sessions will be held from 9am - 11am at the Housing Office, located at 1202 North 6th Street. To register, email LHA@longviewtexas.gov.

Assistance Check Computer Lab:

Every Wednesday at 10am

Attendees **MUST** register to attend. Contact Maria Underwood at munderwood@longviewtexas.gov to register.

Eviction and Court Proceedings Training:

Monday, February 1, 2016, 10am

To register, email LHA@longviewtexas.gov.



HCV Tenant Education Workshop—April 4, 2016 (*Time and Location TBA*)

Fair Housing Training—April 2016

HCV Landlord Workshop Training—November 7, 2016 (*Time and Location TBA*)



The following services will become available in 2016:

⇒ **Landlord Ratings**

Ratings will be based on HQS Inspection Pass Rate percentage, condition of unit(s), and active participation in LHA Landlord Trainings.

⇒ **Full Online Recertifications**

⇒ **Online Trainings**

⇒ **Housing Facebook Page**



Family Self Sufficiency Corner

What is the FSS Program?

Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) is a voluntary program available only to participants of LHA's Housing Choice Voucher Program. FSS provides participants with the tools, encouragement, referrals and support needed to improve their economic situation and reduce their dependence on assistance programs. At the same time, they have the opportunity to have money contributed to a savings account for their family that they can access at graduation.

Who Can Participate?

HCV Participants; the unemployed, underemployed, and those who are satisfied with their jobs; students who are the head of their household; anyone who wants to create change in their lives; people who can work and want to be employed



A huge congratulations to a few of our participants:

Cedric - Recent graduate of Wiley College in Education

Rose - Recent graduate of Kilgore College, now completing a BS at Stephen F. Austin University

Candace - Working as a certified Art instructor

30 Day Challenge

Here at the FSS program we love to talk about goals. Goals help you create a road map for where you are going and figure out how to move towards the life that you want. Often, we focus on big goals: education, employment, home ownership. While these are great, worthwhile goals, small changes are equally important.

Small steps taken can make big changes in our lives. Many people operate under the belief that it takes 21 days to make a habit but whether or not that is true is up for debate. What we do know is this: taking small steps to make small changes can snowball into big differences in your life.

So why not start small? Why not start by challenging yourself and pushing your boundaries for 30 days? You may find that making small changes has opened up big possibilities and can make big differences.

We came up with a list of ideas that may be exciting ways to challenge yourself. Some of them are ideas your case managers are implementing, some are ones that might be too challenging for even us at this time. Steal our ideas and tell us yours – like you, we're always looking for ways to push ourselves to be healthier, more organized, happier individuals.

We all get stuck in ruts where we feel our lives are predictable. But we are quickly approaching a new year! It's a great time to see the person you want to be standing in the future and go running to meet them.



Family Self-Sufficiency Christmas Meet and Greet

FSS Participants:

Your attendance is requested at the meet and greet which will be:

Date: Thursday, December 17, 2015

Time: 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Location: 1202 N. Sixth Street

Refreshments will be served. We look forward to meeting with you at this event.

Please RSVP at aarthur@longviewtexas.gov

30 Day Challenge ideas:

- ⇒ Go through your house and get rid of 6 things a day. You can find things that need to be thrown away, things to donate, or things that would be better used by your neighbors or friends. Simplify the stuff you have and enjoy the stuff you want!
- ⇒ Take a 30 minute walk each day.
- ⇒ Learn a new skill. Spend a month trying to master a recipe to make your own bread, or refurbish a piece of furniture that you hate. Put aside a little time each day (and maybe some help from the internet!) and work on doing something you told yourself you could never do.
- ⇒ Track your spending for a month and work to create a budget!
- ⇒ Challenge yourself to cook at home each night and eliminate fast food. Save the money you would spend on fast food.



The Longview Housing Authority, would like to say **"Thank You"** to all participating families and participating landlords/owners. We appreciate your commitment to the Housing Choice Voucher program goals and look forward to your continued spirit of excellence and cooperation in the coming year.

Have a very Merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year!

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